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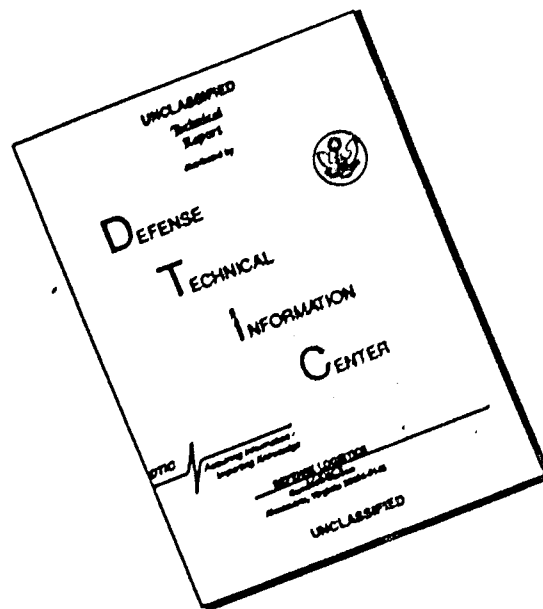
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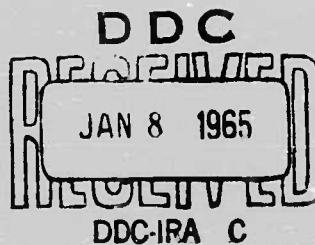
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⑥ RIVERINE WARFARE

⑨ Summary Translations

ATD Work Assignment No. 78
Task 10



⑤ Aerospace Technology Division
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RIVERINE WARFARE

Summary Translations

ATD Work Assignment No. 78
Task 10

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FOREWORD

The present report consists of summaries of two items dealing with French experiences with riverine warfare in Indochina in 1946-47 and 1954. The first period is described by Jean Maclere in the monograph *Marins dans les arroyos* (Sailors in Inland Waterways) and the second in an article by Louis Julien-Binard, *Mémoires of Nam -Dinh*, in the *Revue Maritime*.

- 1) Mauciere, Jean. *Marins dans les arroyos (Sailors in Inland Waterways)*. Paris, 1950.

This book describes naval operations carried out by the French in Indochina between March 1946 and May 1947.

Introduction (pp. 9-;8): The author discusses the situation in Indochina on the eve of World War II, during the Japanese occupation, and following the collapse of Japan and Chinese occupation of the region to the north of 16° latitude as well as the rise of the Viet Minh.

Ch. I (pp. 8-32). The ocean fleet and the action at Haiphong (2-10 March 1946): French sea operations, which culminated in the capture of Haiphong from the Chinese, are described. The names of naval units and of some of the commanding officers are given.

Ch. II (pp. 32-43). The liberation of Hue (20 Dec 1946 - 5 Feb 1947): Since Hue was inaccessible to a direct attack from the sea, owing to the 15 km of swamps and lagoons separating them, and road communications had been rendered impracticable by Viet Minh destruction, the capture of the city had to be achieved by naval operations in support of ground troops reconstructing the Route Coloniale which covers the 104 km between the bay of Tourane and Hue.

After the army, with the support of naval gunfire, had cleared the approaches and made possible the landing of the necessary personnel and materiel, Tourane served as the base of operations. The task of the navy was to support the ground troops by gunfire and to make landings at the entrance of the lagoon of Phy Gia and on the beach of Chon May. Because of the gentle slope of the shelf in this area, the LST's and LCI's were obliged to stand offshore, and the burden of the landing operations was carried out by smaller craft. As a result, the latter suffered considerable damage to their disembarking doors and electric generator units.

An especially hazardous operation was the penetration of a task force consisting of one LCI and several small LCM's into the lagoons of Cay Hay and Est (East). This penetration made possible riverine operations within the confines of the lagoons and along the Song Hue (Rivière des Parfums), which ensured the final success of the entire operation - the occupation of Hue by the ground forces.

Ch. III (pp. 44-65). On board the armed launches (16 Jan - 26 May 1947): This chapter is concerned with the LCVP's used on the waterways during the first part of 1947. These craft, with a maximum displacement of 11 tons, were armed with one 20-mm Oerlikon gun, two 7.7-mm light machine guns, one automatic rifle, and several rifles, revolvers, submachine guns and hand grenades. Their speed did not exceed 7 or 8 knots. They carried some ten crew men and at most twenty-five infantrymen. Examples of their activity serve to demonstrate their effectiveness both in coping with enemy attacks and in assisting military posts stationed along the waterways.

Ch. IV (pp. 66-84). The "Volcan" amidst mines (16 Feb - 12 Mar 1947): This chapter describes the navigation of convoys which for various purposes and in various formations traveled along the waterways converging at the town of Ca Mau, their point of departure. Formations consisted of a variable number of junks, the largest of which were capable of carrying up to 250 tons of charcoal and had roofs on which it was possible to build veritable pillboxes

of brick and sandbags. The escort consisted of the armored barge "Volcan" and three armored launches, assisted when necessary by LCVP's and aircraft. Whatever the purpose of the expedition (food or charcoal supplies, removal of personnel from various posts, assistance to local populations desiring to leave combat zones), the convoys had to navigate in mine-infested waters surrounded by enemy snipers, who occasionally erected highly efficient barriers across the waterway.

Ch. V (pp. 85-98). Porte d'Annam operations (21 Feb - 6 Apr 1947): Following the occupation of Hue, the first task of the navy was to support the ground forces driving along the coast toward the Porte d'Annam pass by gunfire and carrier aircraft and by assistance at river crossings. At first it was intended to land 2000 men and combat material at the estuaries of the Dang Hoi and the Song Giang. However, the lack of recent hydrographic data on the state of the river beds, which in this area shift considerably, made matters very complicated.

The channel of Dong Hoi proved inaccessible to all categories of LC's, and the landing of 800 men and 20 armored cars took place on a beach north of the estuary. Only LCI's, LCT's and LCVP's drawing no more than 1.75 m aft were able to enter the channel of Song Giang and land 800 men. Later on, increasing swells hindered all navigation of LCT's and LCVP's except within the confines of the Song Giang. Nevertheless, the LC's succeeded in landing 800 men on the beach of Quang Khe and in providing the ground forces with the materiel which ensured the successful completion of the Porte d'Annam operations.

Ch. VI (pp. 99-111). An agonizing drift (5-7 Mar 1947): A detailed description is given of the vicissitudes of two LCVP's which, although in poor condition and with damaged weapons and machinery which could be repaired only at Saigon, had been sent to carry replacements and materiel from the village of Can Gio to the post of Dong Hoa. Having fallen into an ambush comprised of snipers on both banks and obstacles placed across the waterway, they suffered severe casualties and were obliged to return without completing their mission. The return voyage was difficult, and one of the craft was compelled to use a 20-mm cannon as a mast and a tent as a sail in order to avoid being drawn into the sea.

Ch. VII (pp. 113-127). Ten days of work in Cochinchina (10 Mar - 15 Aug 1947): American and British launches and barges designed for large combat landings proved most efficient in the course of various missions carried out in the delta of the Mekong both on the larger rivers, tributaries of the Mekong, and on their affluents (rachs).

In order to give an idea of these riverine activities, two specific expeditions are described. The first involved two LCA's which at 8 a.m. on 10 March 1947 started out to discover the exact position of a junk which, according to information received (and proved later to be inaccurate) had been scuttled in order to block the northern channel of the Cao Lanh. However, at the village of that name, it was learned that a patrol of the Foreign Legion which had started two hours earlier from the post of Mytho (an important center of river convoy control and supply) had been intercepted by the enemy and had disappeared. Accordingly, the two LCA's took on board a platoon of legionaries and left for Mytho. Their search for those who had disappeared was unsuccessful. The platoon was landed at Mytho to reinforce the weakened garrison, and the LCA's started patrolling the waterways in the vicinity of Mytho. Suddenly, they were ambushed from a wooded

bank by an enemy force of 500 to 600 men heavily armed with machine guns, automatic rifles, and rifles. The enemy was silenced without losses and with little damage to the LCA's which returned to Mytho, left their ammunition there, and proceeded toward Cao Lanh, reaching it at 2 p.m. There, they awaited low tide and at 6 p.m., taking a few legionaries aboard, they started again on the search for the scuttled junk. Thirty minutes of navigation proved that the latter was nonexistent, and the LCA's returned to Mytho. Fifteen minutes later they were again ambushed from both banks and a legionary was killed before the enemy could be routed. At 7 p.m., the two LCA's anchored at Cao Lanh.

Another example of riverine activities is drawn from the experiences of an LCA and an LCVP, to which, as the expedition proceeded, other vessels were added, and which had for their task the transportation of troops between 6 and 15 August 1947.

Ch. VIII (pp. 129-149). The rescue of "Marché 17" (13-21 Apr 1947): The channel of Tong Doc Loc in the south of the Plaine des Jones had been in times of peace an important commercial thoroughfare linking Saigon with the towns of Chau Doc, Cho Moi, Sadec and Cai Lay and making it possible for ships to avoid the currents and storms of the Mekong. Hence, numerous "marchés" or markets existed in the villages along the channel.

The area surrounding Tong Doc Loc was covered by a network of shallow channels dug in order to drain the swampy terrain, but which, while inaccessible to French vessels, were now utilized by the Viet Minh for their pirogues and attacks on the markets and the convoys plying the Tong Doc Loc. Therefore, military posts had to be maintained for the protection of the markets. One of the most important was "Marché 17," which was subordinated to the Cai Lay headquarters of the Mytho sector.

The garrison of "Marché 17" consisted of 30 men, more than half of them Annamite partisans or Cambodian light infantry. By the time of this narrative, the guerrillas had stopped all commercial navigation along the channel, and the post was completely isolated, receiving its weekly supplies by armed shipments from Cai Lay. On 13 April 1947 it was the object of a violent attack which was repulsed with difficulty. As the post was at that time deprived of radio facilities, the French command became aware of the situation only four days later, and Cai Lay then dispatched two LCVP's carrying one squad, some supplies and a radio set to "Marché 17." On their way they were ambushed and suffered casualties, but ultimately they reached the post at a time when its garrison, surrounded by the enemy, had almost exhausted its ammunition. The LCVP's repulsed the guerrillas by gunfire but, in their turn, they exhausted their ammunition and requested reinforcements. The command at Mytho ordered the armored barge "Devastation" to proceed to "Marché 17".

In peace time, barges of this type served for shipping paddy. High armored hatch covers were fixed vertically on their decks to give protection against pirates. They served as permanent residence to their crews, which consisted of twelve to fifteen men including officers and enlisted men. Between the forward and after deckhouses in which were kept the weapons was erected a wooden, tarpaulin-covered cabin. The after compartment contained the master's cabin, the radio, and the ship's store. The commander's cabin was located amidships. The crew compartment and the galley were forward. The large hold was used for poultry and livestock bought at villages on the

way and consumed aboard or supplied to the posts visited.

The "Devastation" carried three rifle platoons for landings. Its armament consisted of two 25-mm cannons, two 13- and one 8-mm Hotchkiss machine guns, one 50.8-mm mortar with 173 flares or smoke shells, one Sten gun, one 9-mm large-caliber revolver, one rifle, and 42 offensive and as many fragmentation grenades.

From Mytho, the route of the "Devastation" lay westward along the Song Mytho and the Lacombe and Tong Doc Loc channels.

Among the navigational hazards to be reckoned with were barriers erected by the enemy across the waterway, which were particularly dangerous. They are described - somewhat unclearly - as follows:

".... They consisted of a row of parallel stakes driven into the mud covering the bed of the channel; these logs, 12 m in length and 50 cm in diameter, were of wood heavier than water and were linked to each other at the top by a steel cable or a solid chain. When the chain or cable was wound by means of an improvised winch, the barrier suddenly shot upwards. In order to reinforce these stakes, a second row of stakes was then put up [leaning] against the first one. The cable, which was only a temporary fixture, could then be removed. Such barriers could be easily reinforced with mines."

The "Devastation" struck such a barrier in the Tong Doc Loc channel at 3 a.m. on 18 April, and at the same time a second barrier was observed some 200 m farther on. It was decided to return to Nga Tu and await high tide. At 8 a.m. the next day the high tide made it possible to pass over the first barrier, and the "Devastation" proceeded toward the second barrier, while giving protection to troops landed on both banks. The latter were under attack from snipers firing from the tops of coconut palms and had to withstand the assailants while knee deep in the channel mud. Owing to the inequality of forces, the troops were ordered to reboard their craft. The reembarkation proceeded under heavy fire with the barge maneuvering with difficulty between the two banks. This critical situation ended when a couple of volleys from the machine guns of two Mosquito aircraft, answering the radio request of the "Devastation", silenced the enemy. Then the troops could safely reboard, and the "Devastation" returned once again to Nga Tu.

Next morning she was back at the barriers with a squad of engineers and six platoons of infantry riflemen. Three platoons were landed and assisted the sailors in disconnecting the components of the first barrier. It took the engineers 6 hours to blow up the second barrier with charges of several kilograms of plastic explosives.

The "Devastation" proceeded westward accompanied by the troops marching along both banks. However, two more barriers had to be overcome before reaching "Marché 17." At 4 a.m. on 20 April, the "Devastation" returned to Mytho with the wounded, and departed that same afternoon with the equipment, materiel, and labor force required for the erection of a new post at "Marché 17".

Ch. IX (pp. 151-168). The tragic combat at the Xano channel (28 May 1947): This is a detailed description of a disastrous expedition in which a convoy of seven junks loaded with paddy and escorted by an armored launch and two

LCVP's fell into a particularly vicious ambush. As a result, five of the junks were destroyed and the craft returned to base with numerous casualties and heavy damage. The ambush was particularly efficient because the rebels, armed with automatic rifles, were hidden in foxholes and were, therefore, protected from French fire.

Ch. X (pp. 169-188). The death of the barge "Lave" (24 May - 17 June 1947): While carrying supplies along the Muong from Ca Mau to the post at Tan Du Yet, the armored barge "Lave" came across a formidable barrier erected by the Viet Minh, which covered the whole width of the stream and was 70 to 80 m long. It consisted of interconnected stakes and bamboo cemented with earth. For the next several days the "Lave" returned to the barrier bringing coolies who carried out demolition operations. Attempts to blow up the barrier with 50-kg underwater mines and bangalore torpedoes failed owing to the poor quality of the charges. On 16 June, on its way back to Ca Mau for further demolition charges, the "Lave" struck a mine and was partly sunk suffering heavy casualties in dead and wounded. The survivors used what remained of the guns to defend themselves against Viet Minh gunfire and grenades from the banks. They were finally rescued by riverine forces dispatched from Ca Mau.

- 2) Julien-Binard, Louis, Lieutenant Commander, Memories of Nam-Dinh, March 1954. La Revue Maritime, Numero Special 123, Noel 1956, 1583-1606.

Following the Viet Minh offensive of December 1953 - February 1954, the road communications between the French strongholds in North Viet Nam (Tonkin), particularly between Nam Dinh (see Fig. 1), Haiphong, Hanoi, and Hung Yen, were by March rendered so precarious that the strongholds were threatened with isolation from each other. Hence arose the necessity to reinforce the riverine forces in order to ensure contact through the waterways.

To this end, the French Naval Command at Nam Dinh took the following measures: The 35th and 32nd commando units were brought to reinforce the 63rd commandos of the Nam Dinh DNA-3 (3rd Naval Assault Division). To the latter were added the Vietnamese DNA-2 grouped around an LSIL, 12 Vietnamese VV (ex-LCVP) river vessels, 12 LCM's of the transportation corps, 2 LSSL's, and the major part of DNA-12, which had retreated to Nam Dinh. Grumman Goose aircraft were added to the Morane aircraft of the Navy used for reconnaissance flights. At the same time the naval forces of Haiphong consisted of 8 LCT's to which were added 2 civilian LCT's and a number of scows. (See Fig. 2.)

This buildup made it possible to establish contacts every three days at the estuary of Cua Balat between convoys arriving from Haiphong (the source of all supplies) and those from Nam Dinh (the center of distribution to the combat zone). The Nam Dinh convoys consisted of 3 to 5 LCT's and some 20 smaller craft.

Upstream, the main purpose of Nam Dinh convoys was to maintain contact with the Hung Yen sector, which was inaccessible to ground forces and depended on Nam Dinh for its supply. Each convoy returning from Cua Balat included one or two LCT's destined for Hung Yen. At the confluence of the Nam Dinh Giang and the Red River the convoy was met by a formation consisting of a group of mine sweepers (1 monitor, 3 LCM's, 4 VV's), sucking dredges, 6 LMC's (carrying the commando units) and 2 VV's for command and liaison. This formation escorted the LCT's heading for Hung Yen, while the rest of the convoy returning from Cua Balat was unloaded and reloaded at Nam Dinh for its next voyage downstream.

During the unloading of the LCT's at Hung Yen, the three commandos, reinforced by 2 or 3 companies of the Hung Yen Vietnamese garrison, carried out security operations intended to reduce to some degree the Viet Minh pressure on both banks of the river. Upon completion of the unloading, the whole convoy returned down the river and was met at the confluence of the Nam Dinh Giang and the Red River by the Nam Dinh convoy headed for Cua Balat. Here the Hung Yen LCT's destined for Haiphong placed themselves at the rear of the Nam Dinh convoy, while the smaller craft and the commandos, after 60 hours of continuous operations, remained at Nam Dinh.

The 40 km separating Nam Dinh and Hung Yen were covered by the convoy in a state of constant combat readiness. Its armament consisted of 40-mm guns, 20-mm machine guns and 60-, 81-, and 120-mm mortars, and the commandos were ready to land at any emergency. The more dangerous sectors, before being reached by the convoy, were covered by 105-mm gunfire from army batteries. Air observations obliged the enemy to hide and hindered its activity.

In spite of such precautions, a convoy heading for Hung Yen was ambushed on March 15. Since the purpose of this expedition was to reconnoiter beyond Hung Yen, the convoy did not include any LCT's, but consisted of two LSSL's, one LCI, three monitors, three LCM's and two VV's for mine sweeping, and two VV's and six LCM's with the three commando units aboard. As the convoy reached the 86th km it was subjected to heavy mortar and bazooka fire from positions which could not be detected from the air. The answering fire of the 40- and 20-mm guns of the LSSL at the head of the convoy was so efficient that the rear of the convoy was hit by only a few automatic small weapons and 12.7-mm volleys, and the convoy proceeded upstream without having to land the commandos. Next day, on their way back to Nam Dinh, the commandos went ashore and discovered deeply buried heavy guns and mortars abandoned by the enemy.

For the next ten days riverine operations proceeded normally and contacts between Hanoi and Ham Dinh riverine forces were reestablished.

On March 27, the convoy heading from Hung Yen to Nam Dinh was ambushed near the village of Ngoai-Thon (see Fig. 3). The convoy consisted of a forward group (groupe d'ouverture) — mine sweepers, the LSSL "La Rapiere", and one minesweeping LCM; an assault group — one LSIL (HQ 31), which was the flagship of the commander of the expedition, two VV's which carried the commander of the commandos and his staff, and 6 LCM's having aboard the 63rd, 35th and 32nd commandos; four empty LCM transports; and a support group — LCT's 9062 and 9067, one of them armed with a 120-mm mortar.

While the convoy proceeded at a speed of 8 knots toward the dangerous river bend in the vicinity of Ngoai-Thon, air reconnaissance reported the presence of the enemy on the right bank and the forward group opened fire, the 40-mm mortar of the HQ 31 firing continuously from her starboard over the top of "La Rapiere". However, as "La Rapiere" reached the right bank and swung to port in order to take the bend and while the HQ 31 was 120 m behind and the LCT's had not yet left the left bank, the enemy attacked simultaneously at the front and the rear of the convoy from both banks. One of the LCT's was heavily damaged and the rear of "La Rapiere" was hit by a 57-mm shell. In spite of their proximity to the HQ 31, the LCM's succeeded in landing all three commando units. Supported by the ship guns, whose fire was directed mainly on Ngoai-Thon, the base of the ambush, the commandos gaged the Viet Minh in ground combat and cleared the river banks of the enemy. The entire convoy could proceed to Nam Dinh, where preparations were made to receive the wounded and make repairs. The French losses were 6 dead and 18 wounded. The commandos killed 43 Viet Minh and gunfire from the ships destroyed many more.

At 6 a.m. the following day, the next convoy was ready to weigh anchor for Cua Balat.

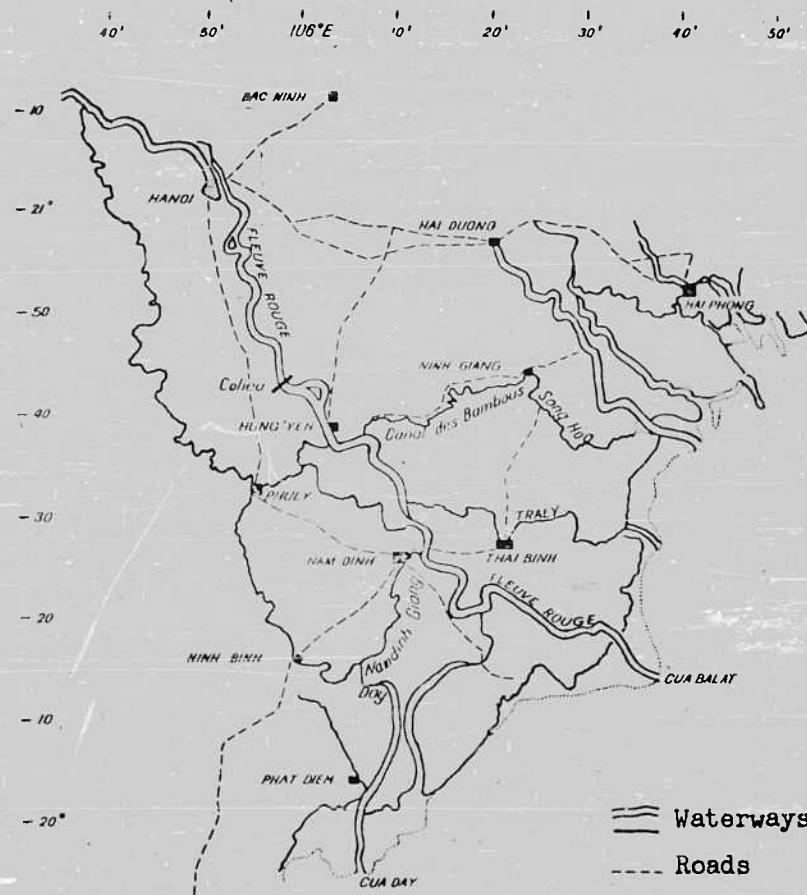
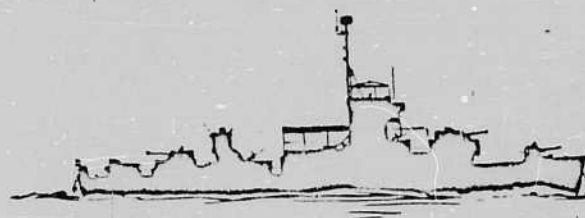


Fig. 1. Tonkin



LSSL Landing Ship Support Large

400 tonnes (net) - 49 m x 7,1 m x 1,9 m

1600 CV - 15 nœuds - 60 hommes

1 canon de 76, 2 mortiers de 81

4 canons de 40 auto-télécommandés

4 canons de 20, mitr. et lance-grenades

LSIL Landing Ship Infantry Large

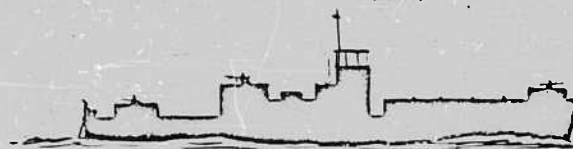
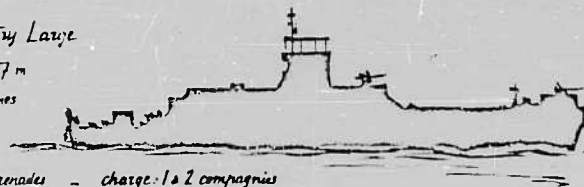
350 t. (net) 40 m x 7,1 m x 1,7 m

1600 CV - 15 nœuds - 35 hommes

1 canon de 76, 1 mortier de 120

2 mortiers de 81, 1 canon de 40

2 canons de 20, mitr. et lance-grenades - charge: 1 à 2 compagnies



charge 1 à 2 compagnies

LCI Landing Craft Infantry

48 m x 7 m x 1,7 m - 300 tonnes

1600 CV - 15 nœuds - 25 hommes

1 canon de 75, 1 canon de 40

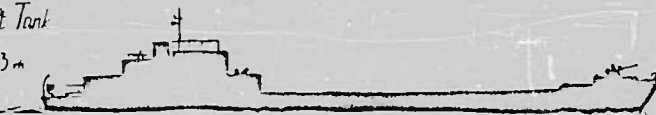
4 de 20, mitr., lance-grenades

LCT Landing Craft Tank

250 tonnes - 57 m x 12 m x 1,3 m

9 nœuds - 25 hommes

charge: 1 bataillon, ou matériel lourd roulant ou en caisses



MONITOR ex LCM landing craft material

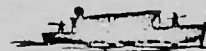
1 canon de 40, 5 mitr. de 20 et 12,7, lance-grenades,

1 mortier de 81

LCM

mitr. de 20, 12,7 et 7,6 - lance-grenades

dragage grappin - charge LCM min: 2 sect. à 1 cte



EA et VV ex-LVP

landing Craft Vehicle Personnel

mitr. de 12,7 et 7,6, lance-grenades

dragage traversée



GRUMMAN GOOSE

"Sepia"
bombes et mitr.



MORANE

"criquet"

J. L. L. L.

Fig. 2. Ships and aircraft

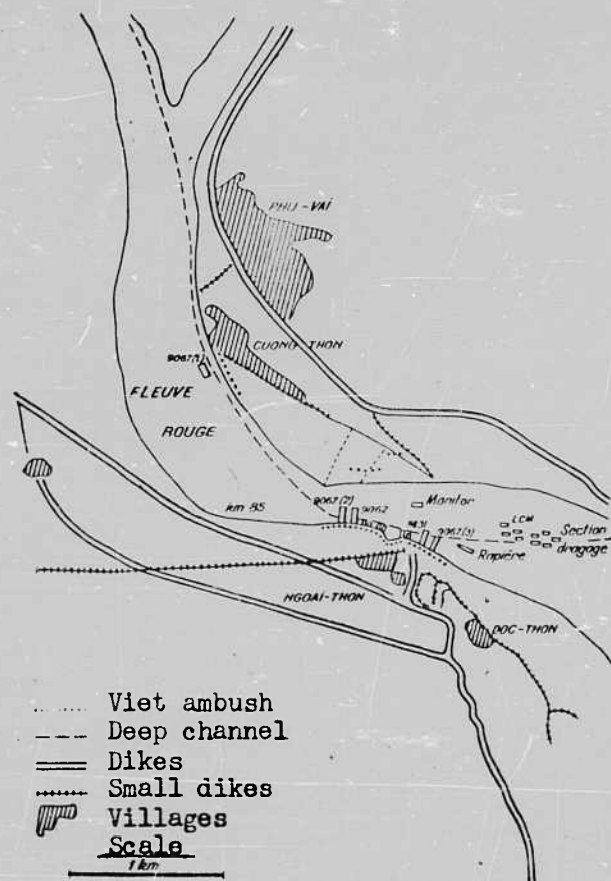


Fig: 3. Ambush of NGOAI-THON, 27 March 1954